



Promote the Vote submits this written testimony in support of HBs 4839 and 4845 and in opposition to HBs 4837 and 4876. Promote the Vote is neutral on HB 4838.

HB 4837 Is Vague and Unnecessary.

Promote the Vote opposes HB 4837 because Michigan already limits and controls who can edit the information in Michigan’s voter registration database to trusted officials and staff. This bill appears to be predicated on misinformation about how Michigan’s voter registration database currently works. Promote the Vote further opposes this bill because the vague use of the term “access” may interfere with the public’s access to information contained in the voter registration database under Michigan’s Freedom of Information Act.

HB 4838 Would Codify the Existing Practice of Not Having Electronic Poll Books Connected to the Internet.

Electronic poll books are the laptops used to check in voters in polling locations across Michigan. The poll book, which used to be a paper record, is now a file saved directly on each laptop. Electronic poll books are not connected to the internet throughout Election Day. Promote the Vote is neutral on HB 4838, because this practice is already in effect.

HB 4839 Would Make Absentee Voting More Accessible for Eligible Voters.

Promote the Vote commends state and local election officials, the Secretary of State included, for mailing an application for an absentee ballot to every registered voter in Michigan for the May, August, and November 2020 elections. The mailing of such applications assisted voters in exercising their constitutional right to vote by absentee ballot. Promote the Vote supports the continued mailing of such applications to all registered voters, not just those voters on the permanent absentee voter list, because it ensures robust implementation of this still relatively new constitutional right.

As has always been the case, each and every application submitted by a registered voter is verified before a ballot is sent. The mailing of absentee ballot applications and providing access to the application in multiple formats online ensures equal access to absentee voting for all of Michigan’s registered voters, regardless of access to the internet, a printer, or awareness of or placement on their community’s permanent absentee voter list.

HB 4839 permits local clerks to provide eligible voters with an absentee ballot application that would be good for a year. Michigan law already provides for a single application to be good for a primary and a general election. To ensure equal access to all registered voters across Michigan, Promote the Vote recommends that HB 4839 be amended to require that the annual application be available in all Michigan communities.

Promote the Vote also supports the provisions in HB 4839 requiring local election officials to honor applications for absentee ballots provided by the Secretary of State.

Because these provisions would make absentee voting more accessible for eligible voters, Promote the Vote supports this bill.

Promote the Vote Supports Signature Verification Training in HB 4845.

Signature verification is an important part of Michigan's electoral process. Promote the Vote supports training on this task for relevant officials to ensure that no voter is unlawfully disenfranchised. Therefore, Promote the Vote supports HB 4845.

HB 4876 Will Make It More Difficult For Election Inspectors To Serve the Voters; It Will Not Make Michigan's Elections More Efficient or Secure.

Poll workers, formally called election inspectors under Michigan law, are heroic individuals who, on Election Day, serve voters and administer elections. Poll workers deserve our gratitude and appreciation, and we need to encourage more citizens to step up and serve as poll workers. Poll workers swear an oath to support the constitutions of the United States and the State of Michigan, and to faithfully discharge the duties of the office of election inspector to the best of their ability. MCL 168.680. However, rather than supporting poll workers in performing their duties, HB 4876 is yet another bill that threatens to dangerously increase the power of challengers and others over poll workers. Therefore, Promote the Vote opposes the bill.

Election officials struggle tremendously to recruit enough poll workers for each election. Pursuant to MCL 168.674(2), they do their best to appoint an equal number of election inspectors in each precinct from each major political party. HB 4876 does not make it easier to do so, by, for example, increasing the pool of individuals who can serve or providing for increased pay for grueling work. Rather, the bill would simply make a poll worker's job more difficult. It would allow any member of the public to demand to see a poll worker's political party designation, which is disruptive and would distract from the crucial task of serving voters. On Election Day, poll workers should be focused on serving the voters, not responding to inquiries into their political party affiliation.

Poll workers are already required to complete an application and to designate their political party. MCL 168.677. Those applications are available under Michigan's Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). Poll workers are also required to certify that they are not a member or advocate of a political party other than the party identified on their application. MCL 168.677. HB 4876 will not make our voting system more accessible, efficient, or secure, but it will make the already difficult task of recruiting poll workers even harder. Therefore, Promote the Vote opposes the bill.